

SESSION 2003 REVIEW

10TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Rep. Barbara Bailey

Rep. Barry Sehlin

Dear Friends,

What a difference a month makes.

The 2003 legislative session was a resounding victory for the taxpayers of Washington, families who need jobs, and the employers who provide those jobs. The extra 31 days of special session were long and frustrating, but well worth the effort.

At the end of the regular legislative session in Olympia in April, lawmakers adjourned with a \$360 million tax increase on the table and very little to show for our push to create new job opportunities for Washington's working families. There were successes in the first 105-day session, such as the progress made on investments in transportation. But we had yet to measure up satisfactorily on our primary objectives: creating jobs and restoring the public's trust in government.

Critical to the trust issue was our ability to have government share in the challenges of these difficult economic times by balancing the budget without raising taxes. Facing a \$2.6 billion shortfall, it was not an easy task, but we recognized that families have been hurting too.

By working an extra 31 days we were able to devise a bipartisan budget requiring no burdensome new taxes. That's \$360 million Washington taxpayers won't be paying this year, and every year into the future.

As always, we welcome your questions and concerns regarding legislative issues. We are also happy to assist you in your dealings with state government. Our job is to serve you, as well as represent you, so please contact us if we can help.

Sincerely,



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Responsible budget averts tax increase

With our state facing the worst economic recession in a generation, House and Senate Republicans felt it was imperative that the Legislature not place a greater burden on taxpayers in our state. With a state budget deficit approaching \$3 billion, we insisted that government establish priorities and then make the tough choices to achieve those priorities while living within our means, just as families must do.

House and Senate Republicans, as well as some Senate Democrats, and the governor all agreed with this approach, but House Democrats proposed a number of tax increases to fund pay raises for government employees, while making deep cuts in services for the elderly, the developmentally disabled and other vulnerable citizens. It would have been irresponsible to raise taxes on families in our state, many of whom have lost their jobs or taken cuts in pay, in order to provide pay raises to state workers.

In the end, a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers prevailed and adopted a no-new-tax budget that focuses limited resources on our most pressing priorities and protects services for the truly needy. The budget allocates a little more than \$23 billion for state government

operations through June 2005. The budget avoids drastic cuts in services for developmentally disabled and troubled youth. It protects health care services for children living at up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and provides a 75-cent-per-hour pay raise for home health care workers.



At the same time, the budget reflects our continued support for K-12 education, which is state government's paramount constitutional duty. It provides pay increases for teachers in their first seven years on the job, when they are most likely to abandon the profession. The annual starting pay for Washington teachers will climb to \$30,000 in the budget's second

year. Also, funding under Initiative 728, the class-size initiative passed by voters in 2000, will climb to \$254 per student, from \$212. Total K-12 funding will increase from \$5,367 per student to \$5,469 per student.

The no-new-tax approach Republicans stressed during the weeks of budget negotiations was not just a slogan. Economic conditions have forced families and employers across Washington to focus on the essentials and tighten their belts. Now, because of our resolve, government will do the same.

Solutions for a better economy by creating jobs for families

We have high expectations for our quality of life in Washington: excellent schools for our children, affordable health care for our families and seniors, and protection of our open spaces and pristine natural environment. Without a healthy, diversified and robust state economy, our quality-of-life expectations become more difficult to achieve.

The 2003 session produced substantial reforms to improve our state's business climate and encourage employers, such as Boeing, to invest and expand job opportunities in Washington:

- Significant new investments in our transportation infrastructure and efficiency reforms to give us the most for our taxpayer dollar;
- Tax incentives for new aerospace investments to entice Boeing's 7E7 assembly to Washington;
- Three important laws that change our state's water policy and help growing cities by offering greater flexibility to communities to respond to local needs;
- Reforms to the state's costly unemployment insurance system;
- And reforms to our state's workers' compensation systems to ensure fairness and predictability.

More work must be done to strengthen our economy and stimulate job growth. But the accomplishments of this session have finally put us on the right course.



Bailey sees two of her bills become law in first session

Rep. Bailey had two of the bills she introduced this session make their way through the long legislative process and become law. One takes effect this month and helps Washington prepare for a statewide emergency and safeguards citizens by creating a list of health care providers willing to serve as volunteer resources during a statewide emergency or disaster.

Another, which takes effect this fall, clarifies and improves Washington's retire/rehire law by prohibiting state employees—not including teachers or school administrators—from retiring with a written or verbal agreement to be rehired into a similar position. This ensures the person is in fact retired before being rehired

into a similar position when a non-retired qualified candidate can't be found to fill the job. Rep. Bailey is disappointed the governor vetoed sections of the law which apply to teachers and school administrators because it creates a significant disparity among state employees in the process by which they can be rehired into the system.



Health care improvements made but more are needed

The Legislature had some wins in its effort to provide quality care to more people in Washington, but there is much to be done to make health care more affordable and available to all. Rep. Bailey, assistant Ranking Republican on the House Health Care Committee, will go on a health care tour this fall, meeting with providers and administrators at long term care facilities, hospitals, public health clinics and medical offices. She hopes to gain more insight into and support for health care reforms that she will help foster next session.

Important changes to medical malpractice and small group health insurance as well as the state's Medicaid program, in the area of reimbursements to doctors and hospitals, are still needed and are particularly important to 10th District residents. Too many government mandates make health insurance too costly and force more lower- and middle-income workers to go without coverage. Small group reform is still needed to help employers offer affordable coverage to their employees.

The price of insurance that doctors and hospitals need to protect themselves from multi-million dollar lawsuits is too high. Medical malpractice insurance reform would have brought down the cost of insurance, kept phy-

sicians in practice, and reduced the overall cost of health care. Rep. Bailey knows that constituents in her District are clamoring for solutions to both of these problems.



One victory this session can be found in new effectiveness and cost-efficiencies for government health coverage. Reforming and redesigning the Basic Health Plan—that offers subsidized and nonsubsidized health care coverage for low-income people without any federal funding—will make it more affordable to cover more Washingtonians

(100,000 enrollees) without continued cost overruns for taxpayers.

Lawmakers made a small step in the right direction with prescription drug legislation designed to save the state money when it purchases medications for people who rely on government funded health coverage. It's disappointing, however, that House Republicans' push for true senior prescription drug assistance—that would have done more to help seniors get the medicine they need but can't afford without a true benefit—was halted. Now it will be everyone's responsibility to monitor any progress associated with this new law to make sure it really helps. There is still more we can and must do for our seniors and that work should occur next session.

Investing in transportation to get results

Traffic congestion continues to stifle our economy and quality of life in the Puget Sound region. This year the Legislature responded to this pressing issue with a new 10-year, \$4.2 billion budget that focuses money where it's needed most.

The budget provides \$2.2 billion for highway projects in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties - where the state's worst traffic congestion is located.

The budget calls for a one-time, 5-cent-a-gallon increase in the gas tax, a 15 percent increase in weight fees for commercial trucking and a 0.3 percent sales tax on vehicles. Here is what our communities will get for that extra nickel on the gas tax:

- Construction of an additional lane in each direction from the 'Y' at SR 20/SR 536 to I-5 at Burlington. Finally. We've been waiting for this one since the original widening of SR 20 in the 1960s.



- Construction of HOV lanes in each direction of I-5 through Everett core to improve travel reliability and congestion relief.
- I-5 safety improvements between 52nd Avenue and SR 526.

- Safety improvements on SR 20 between Quiet Cove Road and SR 20 Spur. The project will eliminate the intersection at Deception Road and Miller Road and make other safety improvements.

- The addition of turn lanes on SR 20 at Ducken Road.

- \$298 million for ferry service improvements, including vessel replacements and preservations, as well as terminal construction and

improvements at Mukilteo, Anacortes and Edmonds.

- \$21 million for passenger rail improvements between Bellingham and Seattle.

Once these projects are completed and the bonds for them are paid off, the budget calls for the 5-cent gas tax increase to be eliminated.

Improving accountability in transportation

As we fix our roads, we also have work to do to make some major repairs in public confidence that has resulted largely from the mismanagement of Sound Transit. We made progress in some areas, such as Senate Bill 5748, which authorizes regular performance audits of the Department of Transportation to help find ways for the state to get the most construction and give motorists the most benefit for their money.

The Legislature fell short in other efforts to improve efficiency, including a Republican proposal to allow the department to contract out more work through competitive bidding to the private sector.

We'd like to hear from you!

If you have questions or ideas about issues being addressed by the Legislature, we'd like to hear from you. Please provide the information below. You may also contact us directly via e-mail at:

sehlin_ba@leg.wa.gov or bailey_ba@leg.wa.gov

Name _____

Address _____

_____ and/or

E-Mail _____

Comments: _____



Rep. Barry Sehlin is the lead budget negotiator for Republicans in the House of Representatives.

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